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Viewing cable 07BEIJING7004, CONTACTS ASSESS HU JINTAO'S STRENGTH AFTER THE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 BEIJING 007004
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SUBJECT: CONTACTS ASSESS HU JINTAO'S STRENGTH AFTER THE
PARTY CONGRESS

REF: A. BEIJING 6940 (NOTAL)
[1](#)B. BEIJING 6777 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Clark T. Randt, Jr.
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Chinese President Hu Jintao succeeded in further elevating his authority at the recently completed 17th Communist Party Congress, most Embassy contacts believe, though they differ to what extent. A minority of observers, however, argue he fell short of his goals. Despite Hu's apparent gains, local observers are in broad agreement that Hu is not as powerful as past supreme Party leaders, and most take this as a positive sign of a more collective, institutionalized leadership, eschewing the "strongman" politics associated with past leaders such as Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. On personnel decisions at the Congress, sources acknowledge that Hu had to accommodate other interests within the Party, although they disagree over the implications of the new Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) lineup on Hu's influence. Some focus on Hu's having achieved his top priorities, namely pushing out Zeng Qinghong and elevating his protege Li Keqiang, while others assert that Hu and his allies still remain a minority on the PBSC. Turning to the Congress's policy outcomes, sources emphasize that the elevation of Hu Jintao's "Scientific Development Concept (SDC)" and its incorporation into the Party Constitution mean that Hu's policies will guide the Party for the next five years, though serious challenges to their implementation remain. End Summary.

Collective Leadership: "Kinder and Gentler" Politics?

[1](#)2. (C) A key issue for local observers as they try to make sense of the recently completed 17th Communist Party Congress (Ref B) is assessing General Secretary (and President) Hu Jintao's attempt at the Congress to consolidate his power and leave his stamp on the Party in the coming five years and beyond. Virtually all contacts believe Hu emerged from the Congress stronger than he was in 2002, when he had just been named General Secretary at the 16th Party Congress and yet was still surrounded by the cronies of his predecessor Jiang Zemin, who also stayed on until 2004 as head of the Central Military Commission. Yet contacts differ considerably on just how much power and influence Hu Jintao has.

[1](#)3. (C) While stronger than before, Hu Jintao falls short of the overwhelming dominance of previous supreme Party leaders, according to almost all Beijing observers with whom we have spoken. Most contacts view this as a positive trend, indicating a more collective, institutionalized leadership that eschews the "strongman" politics associated with past leaders like Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] , told Poloffs on October 31 that, from Mao Zedong on, each successive General Secretary has been weaker than his predecessor, reflecting a maturation of Chinese politics, a desire to avoid duplicating the past excesses brought about by one-man rule and an attempt to ensure stability within the Party. Under Hu Jintao, the leadership has become even more "collective," and instead of

employing the "brutal" and often "bloody" methods of someone like Mao, Hu practices a "kinder and gentler" (wenhe he shanliang) style of politics that emphasizes accommodation and compromise, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] asserted.

¶4. (C) A range of other contacts agree that the trend is toward a more collective leadership. [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN], who has direct access to sources in Zhongnanhai, told Poloff on October 23 that, whatever one thinks about Hu Jintao, the increasing "institutionalization" of the Chinese leadership has prevented a "dictatorship" by the Party General Secretary, which can "only be good" for China. [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] commented to Poloffs on October 30 that at the same time Hu Jintao has made gains in consolidating his power, the leadership has also become increasingly "collective." [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] did not believe that this trend necessarily was good for China, however, passionately arguing that, whatever the power arrangements at the top of the Party, it continues headed down the "wrong path," taking no measures to relax the Party's dictatorial grip on power, which eventually will spell its doom.

Personnel: How Did Hu Fare?

¶5. (C) The makeup of China's new leaders announced on October 22 (Ref B) is one indication of the increasingly balanced nature of the Chinese leadership, Embassy contacts emphasize. Post's sources acknowledge that, in making personnel decisions, Hu obviously had to accommodate other interests within the Party with an eye toward maintaining Party stability and a smooth transition of power in 2012. Neither Hu nor anyone else has the "right" or the ability to designate his own successor. Nevertheless, contacts disagree over the personnel decisions' implications for Hu's influence and his stature within the Party.

Some See a Strengthened Hu

¶6. (C) A number of contacts, for example, have said the General Secretary did well in terms of the new PBSC appointments, thereby strengthening his position. [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN], who has enjoyed close contact with several of China's top leaders and is now a private businessman, told Poloff on October 24 that we should be cautious in declaring a Hu "victory" or "defeat" at the Congress, but Hu nevertheless "did extremely well." No one can get everything they want in life, not even the CCP General Secretary. But Hu achieved his two most important objectives: removal of powerful Vice President Zeng Qinghong and elevation of his protege Li Keqiang to the PBSC. Thus, Hu could "afford" to compromise on everything else, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] argued. Hu's strength is all the more evident, given that remaining PBSC members such as Jia Qinglin and Li Changchun are relatively "weak" and pose "no threat." Xi Jinping is "perfectly acceptable" to Hu Jintao as a young leader with broad support within the Party. Even if new PBSC members He Guoqiang and Zhou Yongkang are close to Zeng Qinghong, Hu can work with them, and none of the new appointments have anywhere near the influence and stature that Zeng Qinghong did, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] said.

¶7. (C) Professor [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] of the Central Party School (CPS) separately agreed that Hu Jintao is "much stronger" coming out of the Congress. In an October 26 conversation, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] said that Hu was "in charge" at the 17th Party Congress, unlike in 2002, when the entire personnel process was "rigged" by Jiang Zemin. This time around, even though Hu was unable to force out Jiang allies like Jia Qinglin, there was agreement on relying on the "67/68 age rule," which was the only "easy," and "smart" way for Hu to effect personnel change. Hu pushed Zeng Qinghong out and got his man Li Keqiang on the PBSC. Moreover, exercising his prerogative as General Secretary, Hu approved all of the new members of the PBSC. Even if new PBSC members He Guoqiang and Zhou Yongkang were put forward by Zeng, Hu still found them acceptable, and there is "no way" that they will form some kind of opposition to Hu. Moreover, Xi Jinping is not beholden to either Zeng Qinghong or Jiang Zemin, even if they were partially behind his elevation. Hu Jintao accepts and recognizes Xi's standing and popularity within the Party, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] said, claiming it is not necessarily the case that Hu insisted on Li Keqiang as his successor.

Others Point to a "Mixed" Outcome

¶8. (C) Other observers saw the Congress personnel outcomes for Hu as "mixed." For example, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] said that the Congress personnel outcomes showed Hu to be "not that powerful." Though Hu did not do particularly well on PBSC appointments, he fared better in appointments to the larger Politburo, where he promoted at least three of his Communist Youth League (CYL) proteges. [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] likewise said he thought the personnel outcomes showed Hu to be only "a bit stronger." Nevertheless, he said, even though Hu could not dictate all positions and had to settle for an outcome reflecting balance among Party factions, it is important to note that there is no longer anyone who can directly oppose Hu and his policies, meaning that Hu is likely "satisfied" with the results of the Congress.

While Some Focus on Constraints to Hu's Power

¶9. (C) On the opposite end of the spectrum, some contacts emphasized that the Congress's personnel decisions revealed Hu's "weakness." Longtime Embassy contact [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN], professor at [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN], told Poloff October 24 that Hu remains "in the minority" on the PBSC, which shows that his power is "not all that consolidated." [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] confessed that he was "somewhat disappointed" in the outcome, noting that going into the Congress he had thought Hu was much stronger. Although Hu is "slightly better off" than he was in 2002, he is nowhere near where some thought he would be, and is "much weaker" than his predecessors, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] said. [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] conceded that Hu succeeded in forcing Zeng Qinghong out, but in return he had to agree to at least two, if not three, people put forth by Zeng. [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] also said he thought one could see Jiang Zemin's hand at work in the personnel appointments, stating that, in his view, Jiang's influence remains more significant than Zeng's.

¶10. (C) [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] University Professor [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] also stressed the constraints on Hu Jintao's power, telling Poloff on October 25 that he "sensed" Jiang Zemin is still exerting considerable influence, having successfully

kept his allies on the PBSC while also elevating new ones. [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN], a pro-democracy scholar at the [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] think tank, told Poloff October 22 that, in his view, Jiang Zemin and Zeng Qinghong's combined influence over the new leadership has actually increased. At a minimum, four of the new PBSC members are "Jiang/Zeng faction members," including Jia Qinglin, Li Changchun, He Guoqiang and Zhou Yongkang. Hu can only count on Wen Jiabao and Li Keqiang as close allies, while Wu Bangguo and Xi Jinping will be "neutral" figures. Thus, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] concluded, Hu will have a "difficult" next five years, being forced to govern from a "minority" position.

The Role of "Factions": Divergent Views -----

¶11. (C) Part of the reason for the divergence in views on how Hu fared in the Congress personnel outcomes appears to stem from contacts' contrasting views on the role of "factions" within the top leadership. As noted above, those tending to believe Hu fell short of his goals in terms of personnel decisions viewed the appointments largely in factional terms, stressing that several PBSC members remain "loyal" to the "Jiang Zemin/Zeng Qinghong faction." [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN], for example, said the PBSC personnel outcomes represent a relatively equal division of power among 1) the Hu Jintao/CYL, 2) Shanghai/Jiang Zemin and 3) Retired Cadre "factions." Among the larger Party and society as a whole, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] saw things as breaking down into factions on the Left and Right, with the "Old Left" and "New Left" on one side and the "Liberals" and "Democrats" on the other. For Ma, therefore, the Congress results can be summarized in the following factional terms: Party leaders, who are divided into the Hu/CYL, Shanghai and retired cadres factions, divided up the personnel appointments, while together these three elite factions decided to chart a "middle course" between the "Left" and "Right" factions of the larger Party and society.

¶12. (C) Several other observers, by contrast, particularly those who thought Hu did very well at the Congress, argue that Chinese politics is much more complex than a simple notion of "factions." For example, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] adamantly declared that one cannot draw clear lines between "so-called factions," arguing "China is not Japan." For example, it would be "naïve" to believe that just because He Guoqiang and Zhou Yongkang were put forward by Zeng Qinghong, they will take orders from Zeng and oppose Hu. [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] said such a notion is "impossible," predicting that Zhou and He will work with Hu, given Hu's "much stronger" position as General Secretary. [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] separately agreed, saying that things are not so "neat and tidy" at the top of the Party as to be divided into clearly defined factions. Leaders cooperate and differ on various issues, depending on the issue at hand. One example, according to [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN], is Beijing Mayor Wang Qishan, who was just appointed to the Politburo. Although Wang is most often viewed as a "princeling," given that he is the son-in-law of former PBSC member Yao Yilin, in reality, Wang also has "close ties" with Li Keqiang and the CYL group. Therefore, "it is impossible" to predict Wang's behavior based solely on his supposedly belonging to the "princeling" faction, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] asserted.

Policy: Hu's Thought Guides Party, but Challenges Remain -----

¶13. (C) While the assessments of what the Congress's personnel outcomes mean for Hu's power vary considerably, Embassy contacts agree that, in terms of policy, Hu fared much better, having successfully achieved a great boost to his "Scientific Development Concept" (SDC). In particular, the attention given to the SDC in Hu's Political Report to the Congress, as well as its incorporation into the Party Constitution, means that Hu's ideas will guide the Party for the next five years.

¶14. (C) Emphasizing Hu's "dominance" in terms of policy, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN], told Poloff on October 23 that Hu Jintao is now in a "very stable" position regarding policy matters, arguing that policy and personnel issues are "completely separate." It is clear that "no one can interfere" with Hu on policy, as Jiang Zemin had done in the past. Although Hu must still deal with others, there is "no serious opposition" to SDC. According to [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN]'s research across the country, a redistribution of wealth via increased public investment at local levels is already happening and will accelerate in the coming months. [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] agreed, predicting that we will see Hu "move out" quickly to speed up implementation of SDC, which faces no real opposition at the center.

¶15. (C) Echoing these sentiments, the [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] said there is no credible opposition to the SDC, remarking that it is "obvious" that the Party needs to deal with the problems brought about by nearly 30 years of economic reform and unchecked development. The SDC is the "only realistic" response to these challenges and "suits the times." [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] downplayed the SDC's placement below that of Deng Xiaoping's and Jiang Zemin's thought in terms of formal status in the Party Constitution. SDC is clearly the Party's guiding policy for the next five years, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] said. Moreover, the gradual elevation of the SDC is part of Hu's "strategy" to slowly raise the stature of his thought while not offending others and stressing continuity with past Party policy. [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] saw things similarly, saying that even though the SDC is not yet at the same level as Deng and Jiang's thought, it is still the center's policy and the guide to development, which is most crucial for the Party. Not directly confronting Jiang by trying to elevate SDC to an equivalent stature reflects Hu's cautions, humble personality and is likely part of Hu's calm, patient approach. At the same time, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] said, it likely reflects the reality that, as of now, Hu does not have the power to formally elevate his thought further, though he should have "no problem" doing so five years from now. Further underscoring Hu's power over policy, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] argued, is his popularity among the "common people" (laobaixing). [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] said even his own informal surveys among blue collar workers and farmers across the country show that they genuinely "like" and "support" Hu and Premier Wen Jiabao, which lends further support to the SDC's aim to address development and income gaps.

¶16. (C) Despite Hu's strength on the policy front, challenges to implementation of the SDC remain. [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] noted that Hu Jintao may be slightly more powerful, but he still faces "serious opposition" to implementation of SDC at the local level. [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] separately agreed, saying that it is local

officials, not princelings at the center, who pose a challenge to Hu. The lower down one goes at the local level, the stronger the opposition to SDC becomes, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] asserted, as most local leaders still want to focus solely on development and "can't be bothered" with things such as environmental protection.

¶17. (C) Sounding the lone discordant note on Hu's policy strength was [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] Professor [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN], who saw Hu's "weakness" in terms of personnel translating directly into "ifficulty" in implementing SDC, both locally and at the center. For [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN], Hu's weakness in policy terms is represented by his inability to inscribe the SDC into the Party Constitution in a manner equal to Deng's and Jiang's thought. (NOTE: It is important to recognize that Hu Jintao is ahead of Jiang Zemin at a similar stage in his tenure as Party General Secretary. Jiang did not get his thought into the Party Constitution until he stepped down as Party chief.) Moreover, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] argued, Hu still is not referred to as "the core" of the fourth generation of China's leadership. [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] saw a host of factors serving to frustrate implementation of the SDC, the most important being the power of retired cadres and their "princeling" sons and daughters, many of whom have become China's "vested interests," controlling major sectors of China's national economy and opposing the SDC, particularly its notion of redistributing wealth to more backward areas. Because of these disagreements, the Congress placed great emphasis on "going back" to Deng Xiaoping thought, which is the only thing upon which everyone could agree, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] asserted. As a result, [TEXT REMOVED BY AFTENPOSTEN] predicted that China's policy "stalemate" on SDC and other issues will continue, with central policy directives remaining "unclear."

Implementation of Scientific Development the Key Measure?

¶18. (C) Despite variations in contacts' views on Hu Jintao's power, all agreed that the coming months should provide a clearer picture of Hu's influence. Most important in this regard, several contacts commented, is evidence of Hu's ability to quicken and expand implementation of his Scientific Development Concept at the local level across China.
Randt